

The Abolition Society of Delaware, 1801-1807

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DELAWARE was always a state of paradoxes regarding Negro slavery and abolitionism. A state which was the home of both the notorious Patty Cannon, kidnapper and murderer of free Negroes, and Thomas Garrett, the Quaker abolitionist who is said to have helped more than 2,700 Negro slaves to escape to freedom, could hardly be expected to be of one mind when it came to the problem of slavery.¹ The prohibition of slavery in Delaware has, strangely enough, a longer history than that of slavery itself in the state. William Usselinx's plan for the colonization of what is now Delaware, presented to the Swedish Trading Company in 1624, forbade the importation of slaves on the grounds that their labor would not be as profitable as that of Europeans. At the same time Usselinx asked if slavery was not inconsistent with the commandment to love thy neighbor.²

Slavery was introduced into Delaware, and a long time passed before a movement toward its gradual elimination grew up. The first form such a movement took was an effort to facilitate manumission of slaves by will or otherwise. As early as 1767 an act was passed by the Delaware legislature permit-

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¹ John A. Munroe, "The Negro in Delaware," *South Atlantic Quarterly* (Autumn, 1957), 431-32.

² Joseph J. Mickley, "Some Account of William Usselinx," *Historical Society of Delaware Papers*, III (1881), 10-11.

Usselinx's position is interesting. As early as 1608 he had written pamphlets outlining the uneconomical aspects of slavery from the European promoter's point of view. However, neither at that time, nor in later publications relating to the colonization of Delaware would he discuss in detail the moral basis of slavery. His arguments were solely economic, and only occasionally did he rhetorically question the moral right of the institution. See John Franklin Jameson, *William Usselinx* (New York: 1887), pp. 43-44, 109.

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ting manumission provided the owner gave surety for maintenance. However, few owners were willing to take responsibility that freed slaves would not become a public charge, and this rendered the act almost useless.³ Not until 1787 did a new law relieve owners of responsibility for maintenance in the cases of slaves between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five who were sound in mind and body.⁴ A master was much more likely to be willing to manumit a slave if he did not face the prospect of supporting him should he become a public charge. Encouraged by this law, masters began manumitting at a much faster rate, so fast that the number of slaves in Delaware dropped from 8,887 in 1790 to 4,177 by 1810.⁵

Attempts were also made in Delaware to limit or abolish the slave trade by legislation. At the beginning of the Revolution a bill to this effect was passed by the colonial legislature, but it was vetoed by John Penn, the English governor.⁶ In 1776, when the citizens were drafting a constitution for the new state of Delaware they provided for what Penn had vetoed: that "no person hereafter imported into this State from Africa ought to be held in Slavery under any pretence whatever; and no Negro, Indian, or mulatto slave ought to be brought into this State for sale, from any part of the world."⁷ However, this constitutional provision was not effective since it was backed by no penalties or enforcement procedures, and it did not abate the slave trade in the state.⁸

The need for a bona-fide statute with real provision for its enforcement was recognized by some men. The legislature passed in 1787 a general law facilitating manumission and prohibiting the export of slaves from the state, which had become a greater problem than importing them into the state. The part

³ *Laws of the State of Delaware*, 1797, I, 436.

⁴ *Ibid.*, II, 885-86.

⁵ Mary Stoughton Locke, *Anti-Slavery in America, 1619-1808* (Boston: 1901), p. 120.

⁶ Munroe, *loc. cit.*, p. 429.

⁷ Ben Perley Poore, *The Federal and State Constitutions, Colonial Charters, and other Organic Laws of the United States* (2 vols.; Washington: 1877), I, 277.

⁸ Since it was not a statute and carried no penalty the provision had no force. For a complete survey of the legal situation in Delaware regarding the Negro see Helen Tunncliff Catterall, ed., *Judicial Cases Concerning American Slavery and the Negro* (5 vols.; Washington: 1926-1937), IV, 211-42.

of this 1787 act relating to manumission has already been discussed. The section relating to the export of slaves stated that any persons who "export, sell, or carry out for sale, any Negro or Mulatto slave from this state to either of the Carolinas, Georgia, or the West Indies, without a licence or permit . . . from any three Justices of the Peace . . . shall forfeit or pay One Hundred Pounds lawful money." Any attempt to export a free Negro met the same penalty. In addition, the law provided that if any person brought a "Negro or Mulatto slave into this state for sale, or otherwise, the said Negro or Mulatto slave" was to be declared free, and the guilty person was to be fined twenty pounds.⁹ This law had some teeth in it and over the next few years a number of convictions were secured under it. In 1792 a Negro named Brister was declared free by the courts because he was sold with intent to export, and in 1803 Guy, a black man, was given his freedom when his master sent him to work on his farm in Delaware.¹⁰

The new law thus had some effect on the export trade in slaves, but it did not frighten the men who were engaged in kidnapping free Negroes and sending them south. The act, by facilitating manumission and increasing greatly the number of free Negroes in the state, actually may have increased this traffic. The type of person engaged in this activity was not likely to be intimidated by the hundred pound penalty the law provided.

This situation resulted in the passage of a new law in 1793 which made the penalty for kidnapping much more severe. It provided that any person guilty of such an act "should be whipped with thirty-nine lashes on the bare back, and stand in the pillory with both of his ears nailed to it, and when he came out to have their soft parts cut off."¹¹ Despite the severity of this law, the business of kidnapping free Negroes, especially young children, continued to flourish in Delaware, located strategically at the gateway of the South.¹² This was probably the

⁹*Laws of the State of Delaware*, 1797, II, 884-88.

¹⁰Catterall, *op. cit.*, IV, 217-18.

¹¹*Laws of the State of Delaware*, 1797, II, 1093-95.

¹²Winfield H. Collins, *The Domestic Slave Trade of the Southern States* (New York: 1904), pp. 85-86.

largest single reason for the formation of the Delaware Abolition Society in 1788. To understand this society properly, however, one must look to its predecessor in Pennsylvania, and to the whole tradition of Quaker abolitionism out of which it grew.

The Society of Friends, with its habit of following basic premises to their logical conclusions, no matter what discomfort that practice led to, was probably the first sect to come self-consciously to the conclusion that slavery was inconsistent with the principles of the Christian religion. George Fox, founder of the movement, as early as 1671 expressed the opinion that there were many bad aspects of human slavery. In America in the early eighteenth century a few men, such as Ralph Sandiford and Benjamin Lay, spoke out against slaveholding itself. Although they were socially ostracized by their fellow Friends, their ideas eventually bore fruit. Persuaded by John Woolman and Anthony Benezet that slaveholding was wrong many Quakers had by the middle of the eighteenth century stopped buying slaves, and some had even begun to free their slaves, although to many this was a real economic hardship. By 1776 Quaker logic had forced most of the Friends to the conclusion that even benevolent slaveholding was a debasing influence on society.¹³

The first abolition society was quite naturally organized in Philadelphia by Quakers, primarily for the purpose of safeguarding the rights of free Negroes and working for the release of those unlawfully held in bondage. The Delaware Society must be viewed as an outgrowth of the Pennsylvania Society, although it had a very active independent existence once it had been founded. One of the Quakers involved in the founding of the Delaware Society was Warner Mifflin, who had freed his own and his wife's slaves in 1774 and 1775, and had ever since devoted himself to the cause of the oppressed Negro.¹⁴ Mifflin was not above aiding fugitive slaves, and he was re-

¹³ Thomas E. Drake, *Quakers and Slavery in America* (New Haven: 1950), *passim*.

¹⁴ Locke, *op. cit.*, p. 94. For an entertaining account of a manumission by Mifflin see Hilda Justice, comp., *Life and Ancestry of Warner Mifflin* (Philadelphia: 1905), pp. 59-63. Also included in this volume are the various memorials sent by Mifflin to the United States Congress.

garded by his opponents as a fanatic. It was Mifflin who in 1786 drafted a petition to the Delaware Legislature proposing emancipation.¹⁵ Mifflin's zeal, but not his apparent disregard of the law, was incorporated by a group of fellow Quakers who in 1788 formed the Delaware Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, for Superintending the Cultivation of Young Free Negroes, and for the Relief of Those Who May Be Unlawfully Held in Bondage.

Convinced that concrete legal action in individual cases was the only answer to the challenge of kidnapping, a group of the men who had signed the Friends' 1786 memorial asking for the passage of the abolition bill by the legislature, wrote a constitution and formed a society dedicated to that purpose. The constitution, published in 1788, provided for a society of unlimited membership which would support its activities by the contribution of ten shillings annually per member, and which would meet quarterly to act on policy questions. An acting committee of six, later five, members was provided to conduct the business of the society between the quarterly meetings. This acting committee was empowered to hire lawyers and required to keep minutes and report them at the quarterly meetings.¹⁶

The preamble of the constitution employs bold language in describing the evil attributes of slavery, calling it "uniformly disgraceful and pernicious [and adverse] to good morals, to the rights of mankind, the feelings of humanity and the sacred obligations of the Christian Religion." This high-flown language is followed by an indication of the practical purposes of the society: "But if the practice of Slavery were in itself justifiable, it is impossible to vindicate the illegal exercise of it."¹⁷ While the society would not aid slaves to desert their masters illegally, it would fight actively to preserve the rights of free Negroes.

Apparently founded the same year or possibly in 1789 was

¹⁵ Drake, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

¹⁶ *The Constitution of the Delaware Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, for Superintending the Cultivation of Young Free Negroes, and for the Relief of Those Who May Be Unlawfully Held in Bondage* (Philadelphia: 1788), pp. 6-7.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

the Delaware Society for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery which had its headquarters in Wilmington and which had an entirely different group of members. This may very well have been a part of the larger state society, but in any case this Wilmington society announced a meeting in the *Delaware Gazette* for January 31, 1789. The minutes of the proceedings of the Convention of Abolition Societies which met in Philadelphia in the second week of January 1795 list two delegations from Delaware: the Delaware society, represented by Richard Bassett, John Ralston, Allen McLane, and Caleb Boyer, and the Abolition Society of Wilmington, represented by Cyrus Newlin, James A. Bayard, Joseph Warner, and William Poole.¹⁸

What happened to the Delaware society, which had its headquarters at Dover, is not known. Some time between December 16, 1799, and December 12, 1800, the Wilmington society was disbanded.¹⁹ It was re-established on December 12, 1800, as the Delaware Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery and for the Relief and Protection of Free Blacks and People of Colour, Unlawfully Held in Bondage or Otherwise Oppressed.²⁰ It is this society's minutes which have survived, both those of the whole society and of the all-important acting committee.

The new society was modeled on the constitution of the Delaware society of 1788 in the most basic respects. Officers were president, vice-president, secretary (later a treasurer was added), and a four-man acting committee. Francis A. Latta was the president who called to order the first meetings held in Samuel Ford's schoolhouse.²¹ Ford rented his schoolhouse to the society for twenty-five cents per meeting without fire, and fifty

¹⁸ *Minutes of the Proceedings of the Second Convention of Delegates from the Abolition Societies Established in Different Parts of the United States, Assembled in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: 1795), p. 6.

¹⁹ "Extract from Minutes of the Abolition Society of Wilmington, held 12 mo. 16, 1799," loose MS file, folder "Slavery and Abolition Society of Delaware," Historical Society of Delaware (hereinafter cited as HSD), refers to attempts to raise money.

²⁰ "Report to American Convention, May 23, 1801," Misc. Papers, 1655-1805, Three Lower Counties Delaware, Historical Society of Pennsylvania (hereinafter cited as HSP), p. 303.

²¹ *Ibid.* Samuel Ford's schoolhouse was located on Shipley Street above Seventh and was still standing as late as 1894. *History of Wilmington, Every Evening*, comp. (Wilmington: 1894), p. 26.

cents when fire had to be provided.²² These meetings were first held monthly, but later were changed to a quarterly basis. Collecting dues was a problem, and the society was often forced to open subscription for special purposes, such as when the acting committee needed funds to prosecute a case.

In the fall of 1801 a special committee was founded to secure additional funds, but by January of 1802, the committee "not having done anything was discontinued."²³ In March of that year the demands of the acting committee for money led to prolonged discussion of the means of raising it, which were apparently successful since on June 19 the acting committee was authorized to draw up to forty dollars for expenses. In October of 1803²⁴ the committee to raise money by subscription reported having raised a sum of \$52.75, and by November 26 the society was considering the best place to invest \$400 so that they could operate on the interest. Where the money came from is obvious when one realizes that the membership of the society was almost wholly prosperous Quaker merchants, manufacturers, and tradesmen.²⁵

Other routine business matters taken up at the meeting of the whole society include the election of officers, the voting in of new members suggested by the acting committee, and the reading of the minutes of the acting committee. The items

²² Abolition Society of Delaware, Minutes, January 20, 1801-July 16, 1819, Gilpin Collection, HSP, entry for April 4, 1801. These minutes, hereinafter cited Abolition Society, Minutes, are not paginated; therefore references will be made to the date of the entry.

²³ Abolition Society, Minutes, January 1, 1802.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, October 1, 1803.

²⁵ Some of the members of the society were Eli Mendenhall (1757-1834), who owned a card manufactory (where he employed women and children, considered an act of philanthropy in that day), and kept a dry-goods store and a grocery; William Poole (1764-1829), a Brandywine miller; William Seal (1776-1842), member of the Delaware Legislature and president of the Bank of Wilmington and Brandywine; Zechariah Jess (d. 1805), secretary of the Board of Health (Wilmington), a teacher, author of an arithmetic text, and a tallow-chandler by trade; Frederick Craig (1756-1841), manager of the Wilmington Almshouse, publisher of the *Delaware Gazette*, one of the organizers of the Wilmington Library Company, justice of the peace for New Castle County, and merchant; David Chandler, secretary of the Economical Society; Ziba Ferris (1786-1875), clockmaker and cabinetmaker; Joseph Grubb (1772-1830), a hardware merchant; Samuel Nichols (1748-1817), who kept a dry-goods store and was a city burgess; and Benjamin Ferris (1780-1867), artist and author. Nearly all members were Quakers in this early period, but there were occasionally Methodists, Presbyterians, and Episcopalians who belonged.

most often appearing on the agenda were the essays, petitions, and addresses sponsored by the society.

Petitions to the legislature of the State of Delaware were drawn up at many meetings, and ordinarily these advocated some type of gradual emancipation law under which the children of slaves would be free. Others dealt with the need for better legislation regarding manumissions, and more severe laws to prevent the kidnapping of free Negroes. The society, in December of 1803, appointed a committee of three (John Jones, Allen McLane, and Cyrus Newlin) to go to Dover to lobby for the bills and petitions of the society.²⁶

While the petitions of the society were framed with definite legislative purposes in mind, the essays and addresses sponsored by the society seem to have had the more generalized purpose of educating the public in the evils of slavery. Unfortunately most of these speeches were made before groups which were already quite sympathetic to the cause of abolition. The society hired a room in the Wilmington Academy, and sponsored a lecture by James M. Broom on the "injustice and impolicy of Slavery, to the general satisfaction of the hearers . . ." in July, 1804. The comments in the minutes of the society indicate that the audience was largely composed of friends of the society.²⁷ In a similar category were the orations made before the meetings of the American Convention.

The American Convention, which met in Philadelphia, had grown out of rather informal meetings of the abolition societies of various states, and by the early 1800's was meeting once a year. The Delaware society was very active in the American Convention, sent three- or four-man delegations to the meetings with reports of the society's activities and accomplishments, and always prepared a lengthy address on the evils of slavery to be delivered before the convention. These addresses were

²⁶ Abolition Society, Minutes, December 20, 1803. John Jones was a Friend who kept a pottery; Allen McLane (1746-1829) was a colonel in the Revolutionary War, Collector of the Port of Wilmington, member of the Delaware House of Representatives, and engaged in trading on the Delaware River with Robert Morris; Cyrus Newlin (1749-1824) was a landlord, merchant, and manufacturer.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, July 28, 1804. James M. Broom (1778-1850), an attorney for the society, was a member of the United States House of Representatives (1805-1807).

carefully prepared by a special committee, and a great deal of time in the meetings was devoted to reading and discussing them.

The Delaware society was truly one of the mainstays of the American Convention, since by 1803 it shared membership with only Pennsylvania, New York, and New Jersey, the southern societies, once members, having fallen away by that date. In 1805, in spite of their own financial problems, the Delaware society voted fifty dollars to the American Convention.²⁸ The reports of the delegations to the convention meetings were listened to very carefully, and suggestions of the convention were often acted upon.

A fairly active program of publication was carried out by the society, which began with the publication in January, 1801, of one hundred copies of the constitution of the society, for distribution to members. The intention was expressed in an 1801 report to the American Convention to publish the laws of Delaware "in so far as they regard the rights and privileges of persons of colour," and an address to the public on the evils of slavery.²⁹ This address was published in the *Mirror* by Francis A. Latta, president of the society, on the 30th of May. It disputed the natural inferiority of Negroes, and lamented the existence of laws which protected the rights of slaveholders. The legal stand of the society was made clear by the address which stated that "as the volumes of our laws are stained with statutes in favor of slavery, we must, as good citizens, submit to the burthen." In vivid terms the address described "the cruel lash of slavery" and asked "Is there a *Christian*, or is there a man *professing* Christianity, who can be insensible to the cries of a mother or a child *kidnapped* from their home, by monsters in the form of men." No human being with feelings could tolerate the re-enslavement of those already free, according to the address, and the public was exhorted to support the new society founded to protect the rights of free Negroes. It is hard to estimate the effect of such an address, but the language used

²⁸ *Ibid.*, December 30, 1805.

²⁹ "Report to American Convention, May 23, 1801," Misc. Papers, 1655-1805, Three Lower Counties Delaware, HSP, p. 303.

was quite strong.³⁰ A permanent committee was formed in 1804 to prepare and publish in the newspaper similar tracts against the institution of slavery.³¹ It seems likely that the publication of speeches in mass media was much more likely to have effect than their original delivery before friendly audiences.

The published literature on slavery was increasing about the turn of the century, and in the fall of 1801 it was suggested that the Delaware society build a small library of histories and essays on slavery. This collection had grown to such a size by 1803 that an archivist was appointed to take care of all the books and papers of the society. This person was also instructed to make copies of the minutes of the society and of the acting committee.³²

Manumissions were occurring at a fairly rapid rate in Delaware, and the society from the very first had a person designated to record these on a master list. By the summer of 1801 it was decided to publish each month's manumissions in the local newspapers.³³ These lists of manumitted slaves were of real use to the acting committee in their prosecution of persons holding Negroes in bondage illegally.

One of the primary aims of the Delaware society was the education and improvement of free Negroes, and aiding them to take their proper place in society. When it reported to the American Convention in May of 1801, the society had not yet undertaken the advancement of Negro education, but had sent observers to the school for free Negroes conducted by John Thelwell where they found twenty attentive scholars receiving instruction.³⁴ By January 16, 1802, Thelwell's expenses were

³⁰ *Mirror of the Times and General Advertiser*, May 30, 1801.

³¹ Abolition Society, Minutes, July 28, 1804.

³² *Ibid.*, November 26, 1803.

³³ *Ibid.*, July 18, 1801. The first such list covering all those persons manumitted between 1790 and 1801 appeared in the August 8, 1801, issue of the *Mirror of the Times and General Advertiser*. The issue for May 21, 1806, contains a more typical short list of those manumitted during the preceding three months.

³⁴ "Report to American Convention, May 23, 1801," Misc. Papers, 1655-1805, Three Lower Counties Delaware, HSP, p. 303.

John Thelwell (1732-1812) was a Methodist who taught school in Wilmington for half a century. He was forced to hold innumerable offices, such as bell-man and clerk of the market, in order to support himself, and he was known as "Daddy Thelwell" to all who knew him. He used Dilworth's spelling book and Gough's *Arith-*

being underwritten by the Delaware society. The expenses of this free school had become so great by the spring of 1804 that the group decided to appoint a committee of ten from their own ranks, two of whom would teach the free Negroes every Sunday afternoon. Provisions were made for hiring a teacher if it proved sufficiently inexpensive.³⁵ The committee of ten carried out their task, held class from two to five on Sundays for several months, and taught thirty scholars "whose conduct, a few children excepted, was orderly and attentive evincing in general a capacity and disposition to profit by the opportunity."³⁶ John Thelwell was eventually put in charge of this afternoon school, and in December of 1806 additional funds were voted to provide an evening school.³⁷ The curriculum was reading, writing, and arithmetic.

Moral education was not neglected, and many meetings were held at which the free adult Negroes were advised how to become responsible citizens. The following report of such a meeting was made before the society: "Your committee appointed to hold a meeting with the free persons of colour informs you that they complied with their appointment. They read the addresses for 1804 & 1805 and such remarks as were deemed necessary were made. The Necessity of putting their children apprentices at a proper period, to tradesmen or farmers—and the Solemn duty of supporting faithfully their marriage covenants were strongly enforced. The people behaved themselves in a manner worthy [of] the occasion and you[r] committee acknowledges with pleasure the satisfaction they enjoyed in the meeting of 1 Mo. 8th 1806."³⁸

The encouragement of the formation of abolition societies in other localities was a persevering interest of the Delaware society. In the first year of its existence, the society was working to establish sister groups in Duck Creek, Dover, and Mil-

metic as texts. On October 14, 1801, Thelwell published a notice in the *Mirror of the Times and General Advertiser* lamenting how few students attended his Sunday free school.

³⁵ Abolition Society, Minutes, April 28, 1804.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, January 1, 1805.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, December 19, 1806.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, January 8, 1806.

ford, Delaware, to be composed of Methodists.³⁹ It was suggested in 1802 that a society be formed on the Eastern Shore which would co-operate with the Delaware society, and aid it in the prosecution of kidnappers.⁴⁰ These attempts appear to have been unsuccessful.

Interest in the Delaware society itself began to waver and die after 1805. Comment was made at a meeting early in 1806 that meetings had not been held with the regularity required by the constitution, and by the fall of 1807 the "remissness" of members in attending meetings led those present at one meeting to consider incorporation which would enable them to make regulations "as will enforce more punctual attendance."⁴¹ There seems little doubt that by 1807 the Delaware abolition society had lost much of its original fervor, and that the enthusiastic spirit in which it had been founded was waning. It had nevertheless accomplished a great deal in its first seven years.

In spite of the varied and valuable activity of the whole society in these years, the real business of the society was transacted by the acting committee, which met irregularly, but often, and which was given wide executive powers. The minutes of the acting committee for the years 1801 to 1807 have survived and through them one can gain a full appreciation of the scope and intensity of the work of the Delaware abolition society.

The job of the acting committee was to see that no Negro was illegally held in bondage, and to this end the members of the committee were ever alert to possible infractions of the laws, and were always ready to receive reports by nonmembers of the possible oppressions of free Negroes, which they investigated thoroughly, however flimsy the original evidence. The members of the committee seem to have been intelligent citizens with some knowledge of the law, but in many cases the attorneys of the society had to be consulted. The attorneys of the society from 1801 to 1807 were James M. Broom, Caesar A. Rodney, and George Read, Jr.⁴² These able lawyers more

³⁹ *Ibid.*, July 18, 1801. ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, June 19, 1802. ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, September 19, 1807.

⁴² Broom has been mentioned; Caesar A. Rodney (1772-1824) was a member of

than once aided the society in prosecuting offending whites and in securing the release of illegally bound blacks, and had occasion to rescue the society from potential lawsuits resulting from its zeal in arresting rumored kidnappers. These three attorneys were each retained at a fixed fee of twenty dollars per year, but if a case were to be prolonged there might be additional reimbursement. It seems likely that financial remuneration was not the sole reason for the diligent work of these three attorneys, and also it seems quite possible that they were members of the society. However, there are no records of membership (other than of the acting committee) for this period. At least one of these attorneys, Caesar A. Rodney, was a member of the Abolition Society of Wilmington in 1798.⁴³ In 1802 John Warner of the Delaware society wrote Rodney in Dover asking him to oppose a bill which would make it easier for slave traders to "carry on their detestable traffic in opposition to all the exertions of the Abolition Society."⁴⁴

One of the most frequent rumors that came to the attention of these attorneys and the members of the acting committee was of manumissions which had not been honored.

On September ninth, 1802, the committee was advised by one Abraham Ritchie that Molly Evans, a Negro slave, had been sold to Samuel P. Moore of Newcastle Hundred for the term of eight years, that period had expired two months previous, and Molly ought to be free.⁴⁵ Moses Rea⁴⁶ and David Chandler were appointed to look into the case and they discovered that Molly had once belonged to Mary Henry of Millcreek Hundred, who on her deathbed had directed that Molly be sold for an eight-year term, thereafter to be liberated. Abra-

the United States House of Representatives, a United States Senator, Attorney General of the United States, and a vigorous opponent of the extension of slavery in 1820; George Read, Jr. (1765-1836), son of the George Read who signed the Constitution, was United States District Attorney for Delaware.

⁴³ *Minutes of the Proceedings of the Second Convention of Delegates from the Abolition Societies Established in Different Parts of the United States Assembled in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: 1798), p. 6.

⁴⁴ John Warner to Caesar A. Rodney, January 21, 1802, Rodney Collection, HSD.

⁴⁵ Abolition Society of Delaware, Minutes of Acting Committee (hereinafter cited as Acting Committee, Minutes), HSD, September 9, 1802.

⁴⁶ Moses Rea (1751-1837), a prominent Friend.

ham Ritchie, as one of the administrators of her will, saw her sold to Moore under those provisions. Moore had confessed himself a member of the abolition society and a friend to all blacks, and he had been considered a good risk by the administrators, Ritchie and a man named John Gregg.⁴⁷

Moore, approached by representatives of the acting committee, refused to surrender Molly and produced a bill of sale with Gregg's signature. Other witnesses (among them Gregg's widow and his brother) were contacted who swore that Molly was sold for a term and not as a permanent slave.⁴⁸ Unfortunately for Molly, the society was unable to procure the documents which would prove her free and the committee gave up the case.

The society checked in 1805 the statement of Doctor John Vaug[h]n,⁴⁹ who reported that "Cuffe a man of color informed him that his master Doctor Bayard had willed him free. But that a son of the Doctor's now claims him & is about transporting him to Cuba." Jacob Alrich and John Reynolds of the acting committee examined Doctor Bayard's will and found no mention of Cuffe's freedom.⁵⁰ In a number of cases, however, the wills examined revealed that the slaves in question had been legally manumitted, and they were freed by the action of the acting committee. When such manumissions were achieved, they were recorded by the secretary of the committee so that if a case were to arise in the future concerning the Negro in question, it could be handled speedily. Every effort was made to make it easier for oppressed Negroes to apply personally for aid. In January, 1802, the acting committee decided that their cause suffered from "persons oppressed, not knowing who to apply to for redress," and that they ought to print the names of the committee in the *Mirror* every three months.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Acting Committee, Minutes, September 24, 1802.

⁴⁸ Acting Committee, Minutes, October 12, 1802. Providing the transaction took place within the state of Delaware either type of transaction was legal. The *Mirror of the Times and General Advertizer* carried during these years many advertisements attesting to this fact. For example, on March 25, 1801, a Negro girl was offered for sale and on January 24, 1801, one was offered for a term of two years.

⁴⁹ John Vaughn was a respected and prominent physician in the state. When he died in March of 1807 the *Museum of Delaware and General Advertizer* carried a long and glowing obituary in the March 28 issue.

⁵⁰ Acting Committee, Minutes, January 4, 1805.

⁵¹ The Democratic-Republican paper *Mirror of the Times and General Adver-*

Related to the problem of manumission was the situation in which a Negro slave would purchase his freedom from his master and would not be set free. Such was the case of Lowden Williams, a Negro man who purchased his freedom from Joseph Ross of Wilmington for fifty dollars, and who was not released after the money was paid. He applied to the acting committee and at the meeting of the 23rd of December, 1802, his case was entrusted to the care of Moses Rea and Hezekiah Niles.⁵² Luckily for Williams, a copy of the legal document signed by Ross was found in the hands of Philip Gillau of Newark, and the committee of two were able to report to the committee of the whole that full manumission had been achieved.

Michael Horn, alias Michael Rutter, who was being kept as a slave in South Carolina, according to James Brian⁵³ of the society, wished that the society would contact certain persons in the Wilmington area who might have documents proving his freedom.⁵⁴ James Brian and John Jones, appointed to check

tizer, published by James Wilson in Wilmington, was favorable to the objectives of the Abolition Society of Delaware. On March 30, 1805, Wilson printed an article on the effect of slavery upon the morals of the Negroes involved; on December 20, 1800, the first page of the *Mirror* sported a eulogistic article on the activities of Warner Mifflin; and on February 15, 1806, there appeared a letter of Patrick Henry on the iniquity and dangerous tendency of slavery.

The issue was to some extent a political football, with both Democratic-Republicans and Federalists wishing to disassociate themselves from the institution of slavery. The *Federal Ark* on November 23, 1802, defined a Democrat as a man who rides in his carriage and holds a number of slaves. The *Mirror* reported on October 2, 1804, a double smear campaign connected with the coming gubernatorial election. The issue was that the Democratic-Republican candidate Joseph Haslett was reputed by enemies to have sold some Negroes South, and the opponents of the incumbent Federalist governor Mitchell claimed he was friendly to slave traders.

⁵² Hezekiah Niles (1777-1839) was a young journalist who was later to achieve prominence as the editor of *Niles' Weekly Register*.

⁵³ James Brian (1758-1836), a Friend, was a leading merchant in the West Indian and Nova Scotian trade. He had extensive business relations with Captain Paul Cuffee, a colored captain who owned several vessels and who employed only colored crews.

Cuffee was often held up by Brian and other members of the abolition society as an example of what the Negro could accomplish. The society decided late in 1806 to send copies of a memoir of Cuffee's life to the Abolition Society of London, and to William Wilberforce and Thomas Clarkson of England. As a result the document was published in England as *Memoir of Captain Paul Cuffee, A Man of Colour* (York: 1811). Cuffee was known and respected in ports around the world. He was also a Quaker and wore the Quaker garb.

⁵⁴ Acting Committee, Minutes, November 18, 1801.

into the case, were apparently unable to find any such documents. But if the society was not always successful, the Negro slaves in the Newcastle County area undoubtedly knew by hearsay of its work and, a fact attested to by the number who applied for aid, knew that their claims would be investigated, and that, if they had a legal case at all, they would be freed by the society.

Besides the matter of manumission, the society was no less active in trying to prevent the kidnapping of free Negroes in the North and their sale South into slavery. When Charles Benson, a free Philadelphia Negro, was lured south by Henry Shunk, Smith Randall, and Jones Bedford, the documents relating to his freedom were taken from him by force and he was sold into slavery in North Carolina. James Hillock, Brigadier General of the 10th Brigade, North Carolina Militia, wrote about Benson to William McMeachen of Christiana Bridge,⁵⁵ who relayed the information to James Brian of the Delaware Abolition Society. On September 13, 1801, at a meeting of the acting committee, Brian and John Warner⁵⁶ were instructed to find the necessary documents and send them South. Through their efforts and those of Hillock, the Negro's freedom was secured, and Hillock offered to help prosecute the three kidnapers for the society. The society voted Hillock their "warmest thanks for his kind and humane exertions in favour of the oppressed man of colour."⁵⁷

During 1805 the committee was faced with two outrages by a vicious group of four kidnapers. First to come to their notice was the case of George Wheatley "Who, while engaged in his lawful business in the hundred of Appo. was fallen on, beaten and bound by a person calling himself Roach de Broom of Maryland and three other men of this county . . . William Goldsborough, William Reynolds, jun., and Henry Neal with the avowed purpose of carrying the negro out of the state. The said De Broom pretended to be the master of sd. George, the other three were abetors and assistants, those seen after

⁵⁵ William McMeachen was a charter member of the Medical Society of Delaware.

⁵⁶ John Warner was one of the directors of the Wilmington Bridge Company.

⁵⁷ Acting Committee, Minutes, March 1, 1802.

greatly abusing and binding the negro were prevented from taking him off, by the intervention of some of the neighbors."⁵⁸ Wheatley was freed, and preparations were being made to prosecute the four kidnappers when reports of a similar attempt were received by the acting committee, September 11, 1805. Goldsborough, Reynolds, and Neal, minus their leader De Broom, had attacked and bound a dark mulatto, named Levin Carney, then employed by Peter Staat, with the intent of carrying him off and selling him into slavery. They had been prevented from doing this by the intervention of Staat, who must have been a fearless person, since the same evening's minutes report that a warrant had been procured for the arrest of the members of this gang, but that "the constable dare not take them." As late as March 17, 1807, when the minutes of the acting committee end, the four men had not yet come to trial.

Whenever a slave was to be sent South, the society tried to prevent the action until the titles and documents could be checked and anything that smacked of slave trading could be stopped. Early in 1801 "some of the members communicated to the committee about six or eight people of colour, men women and children the property of Francis Daumas near the Practical Farmer in Brandywine hundred,⁵⁹ are, it is thought kept in readiness to be sent off by some vessel to a distant place . . . also that Bernard Sassinay⁶⁰ of Wilmington is said to have sent his black man to jail with a view of sending him out of the State."⁶¹ The law of 1787 clearly forbade exporting slaves from the state for any purpose whatsoever, so that if Sassinay were to send the slave South he would be liable to criminal prosecution. This, of course, would not help the poor black man if Sassinay succeeded in getting him out of the state.

⁵⁸ Acting Committee, Minutes, August 22, 1805.

⁵⁹ The Practical Farmer was an inn owned by Daumas near Grubb's Landing on the Delaware River which was a noted rendezvous for those who tried to smuggle Negroes out of the state. Ships bound for Southern ports would anchor off the landing. Anna T. Lincoln, *Wilmington, Delaware—Three Centuries Under Four Flags* (Rutland, Vt.: 1937), p. 148. One can imagine that the members of the society were relieved when Daumas died in 1804 and his inn was sold for taxes at a sheriff's sale, *Mirror of the Times and General Advertiser*, December 1, 1804.

⁶⁰ Sassinay kept both slaves and indentured servants. In 1801 he offered \$10 for Jean Pierre, a French boy who had run away from him. *Mirror of the Times and General Advertiser*, March 11, 1801.

⁶¹ Acting Committee, Minutes, March 18, 1801.

The society, through its acting committee, kept close watch on these two men during the next months. There is constant mention in the minutes of the danger that Daumas was about to send his blacks off. That case ended with Daumas's death, but the case of Bernard Sassinay became more crucial when he took his servant out of jail and sent him to Baltimore. James Brian immediately wrote to the Abolition Society of Baltimore to take over the case. They stopped Sassinay, forced him to give bond for the appearance of Jean Pierre, the slave, and wrote the Delaware society to send proof of wrongdoing at once.⁶² This was done, and James Brian, the correspondent, reported that Jean Pierre had been released and was being sent to Wilmington.⁶³ This close co-operation with the Baltimore society was quite typical of the action of the acting committee.

The closest co-operation was with the society that had been the model for the Delaware society, the Pennsylvania society which had headquarters in Philadelphia. With Delaware's strategic position on the route south from Philadelphia, the cases of free Negroes kidnapped in, or illegally sent away from, that city were often referred by the Pennsylvania Abolition Society to the Delaware society. Such was the case of Pierce Butler of South Carolina, thought to have kidnapped a young Negro boy in Philadelphia. The Delaware group acted on the suggestion of her sister society and stopped Butler on his way south, forcing him to give four hundred dollars bail at Newcastle for the appearance of the boy at next term.⁶⁴ The society kept close watch on Butler even though the case dragged on for more than three years until it was finally decided that there was not

⁶² *Ibid.*, April 27, 1801. The similarity of name between the French boy Sassinay offered a reward for on March 11 seems more than coincidental. One must assume that Jean Pierre was a French Negro or a white slave.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, May 16, 1801.

⁶⁴ Acting Committee, Minutes, March 13, 1801. Pierce Butler had been a member of Congress from 1789 to 1796, but had continued to live in a large house in Philadelphia staffed with slaves. After several years a Philadelphia court freed one of Butler's slaves under a Pennsylvania law since the immunity attached to being a member of Congress had lapsed. Butler fought the action in the courts, and was undoubtedly trying to hustle his slaves South when apprehended by the Delaware society. It may even have been the very slave freed by the courts that Butler was forced to give bond for. See Dwight L. Dumond, *Anti-Slavery, The Crusade for Freedom in America* (Ann Arbor: 1961), p. 49.

enough evidence to support a successful trial. The Pennsylvania society was advised of this action. There seems to have been tacit agreement that whichever society began action on a case would reimburse the other societies to which the case was referred, if those societies prosecuted the case at law or incurred any other expense on account of the case. In September of 1801, the Philadelphia society wrote that they would pay all costs in the case of Mentor, referred by them to the Delaware society for prosecution. When William Hammond of Delaware took an indenture on his slave in order to evade the laws of Pennsylvania, the Delaware society warned the Philadelphia society of it.⁶⁵ This type of co-operation was undoubtedly instrumental in procuring the prosecution of kidnappers who would otherwise have escaped by crossing state lines.

It was not an uncommon occurrence in the early nineteenth century for a person to become the owner of a slave by paying a debt for a free Negro. This practice was not recognized in the states of Pennsylvania and Delaware, but sometimes the Negroes were kept under the impression that they were legally working off a loan and did not realize their masters considered them slaves until they were sold to new masters. A young West Indian mulatto girl named Fortunée was sent in 1803 by her white father from the West Indies to Philadelphia in the company of a Madame Borie. Bad weather caused the vessel in which they were traveling to put into Savannah Harbor where Madame Borie died. Fortunée, after staying in Savannah a while, came on to Philadelphia, where twenty dollars passage money was demanded of her by the captain, although she had understood that her father had paid the sum beforehand. Dr. Pierre Didier happened upon the scene, paid the twenty dollars, and took the girl back to Wilmington with him as a servant. Fortunée worked for Didier for a year and a half, but apparently did not realize that he considered her his slave until he decided in the fall of 1805 to "sell her for a slave to some distant part of the country." She appealed at once to the acting committee, which visited Didier, who asserted his claims to her as property.⁶⁶ The committee was not convinced that he had any

⁶⁵ Acting Committee, Minutes, March 23, 1805.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, August 22, 1805.

legal claims to her and was about to prosecute Didier when the girl ran away from him and left the state. There was some thought that Didier should still be prosecuted, but the charges were dropped since the girl enjoyed her freedom and since Didier was apparently unaware of the fact that he had brought her illegally into Delaware.⁶⁷

Perhaps the most spectacular case of this kind was that of Leah Roche. At a special meeting of the acting committee on November 21, 1803, her case was reviewed by Francis O'Daniel, Nathan Sharples, John Test,⁶⁸ and Hezekiah Niles, the members present. Leah, a young Negress, had been placed by her mother with Jacob Sellars of Wilmington, who intended to bind her to him if she suited him. The mother disappeared without making any arrangements at all about the girl, and Sellars died not long after. Leah was kept as a slave by Sellars' widow and Thomas Cryer,⁶⁹ her new husband. In the spring of 1803 Cryer had Leah committed to jail on suspicion of stealing two hundred dollars, secured her conviction, for which she was sentenced to corporal punishment (either the stock or the whipping post), and then abandoned her.

Leah, unable to pay her court costs and gaol fees, was adjudged liable to be sold for a term not exceeding seven years to raise the money for the fees. After a while Cryer came and paid the fees, but without the benefit of the public sale which had been ordered by the court. This action, as the society was later to prove, did not bind Leah to Cryer for any period of time at all, but was merely a loan of money. Cryer then hired the girl out to John Delahay of Newport, Delaware, at wages payable to himself.

This was, of course, an outrage, and the society resolved to act on the case, but before a week had passed events took a turn which made immediate action necessary. On November 11, 1803, the acting committee learned that the girl had been illegally sold to a person from a southern state and that she

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, September 4, 1805.

⁶⁸ John Test was a lawyer.

⁶⁹ Thomas Cryer was a wholesale and retail grocery merchant.

had been removed to Havre de Grace. The minutes of the acting committee tell the story in dramatic prose:

In the morning of the 13th the acting committee went in pursuit of the purchaser and discovered him on Bread and Cheese Island, his name was found to be John McClatchy. He speedily started from the island and directed his course towards Wilmington. One of the committee hastened on to Newport to obtain a State's warrant for his apprehension while others watched his movements. When he arrived at Newport he was apprehended and taken for examination before Thomas Duff Esquire. During the examination it happened that John McClatchy by his own confession had applied to Thomas Cryer to make an exchange of Cattle for the girl. He was informed by T. Cryer, that he had a privilege from the court for Newcastle county to sell the girl to any person and from any place whatsoever. A sale was made, the price in cattle to be two hundred dollars. On the examination Thomas Duff considered McClatchy liable to commitment and accordingly made out an order for that purpose and the man was placed in Newcastle jail. On the 14th the committee having obtained an order for Leah Roche from McClatchy went to Havre de Grace in search of the girl, They found her at James Thompson's. After considerable difficulty they procured her liberty and brought her to Wilmington in the evening of the 15th inst; On their return they called on John Delahay at Newport and learned that on the 10th instant, Thomas Cryer appeared there and required the girl to go with him to Newark, informing her and J. Delahay's wife, that he had found a new master at that place, who would treat her kindly. The girl was reluctant about going, but on the advice of John Delahay's wife, who assured of her care, and protection she consented to go. Thomas Cryer placed her in his chair, having a gun by his side and drove southward. The committee were informed that he passed Stanton, and Christiana, with the girl in his chair, and McClatchy on horseback with him. They traveled towards Elkton and near that place Cryer delivered her to McClatchy who took her into the town. Thomas Cryer was seen in Elkton on the same evening. Those circumstances were regarded as conclusive evidence of the illegal intentions of Cryer and McClatchy.

In the action that followed the society came as close as it ever came to the charge of committing an illegal act, however unwittingly. The following day, the 16th of November, McClatchy applied through his attorney for release from jail, and

the acting committee at once went to George Read, consulting attorney, who advised them that their warrant had been informal and that unless a new one was drawn up which listed the specific charge upon which McClatchy was being held, the prisoner would be released. This was done and McClatchy was rearrested immediately upon his release from jail. "If this had not been done he would have escaped his punishment, for Thomas Caldwell of Newport, and another of his friends, were in readiness with horses, to convey him beyond the reach of justice." That evening, a meeting of the whole society was called by the acting committee for the purpose of raising additional funds to prosecute this case, which were immediately voted.

The acting committee spent the next morning in conference with George Read, who knocked some of the wind out of their sails by advising them that they had narrowly escaped a penalty of thirteen hundred dollars for imprisoning a man twice for the same offense, a violation of habeas corpus. He also told the committee of other legally dubious acts of the last forty-eight hours, such as the issuing of the second warrant while McClatchy was still in custody. In a more encouraging vein, he concluded that Cryer had employed falsehood in the act of selling the girl, to whom he had never had a legal right in the first place, and that both men were guilty of gross violation of the law, possibly even of kidnapping, "the punishment for which was cropping off both ears and whipping.

"To that kind of punishment the committee felt much aversion. They believe that by mangling the human being in that way he may be rendered an object of derision, and contempt, but that his punishment would rather debase than reform him, and perhaps the example would not be usefull in deterring others as injurious and debasing to the criminal. It was also suggested by counsel, and some of the members the propensity of juries to lean on the merciful side of the question, when the crime was committed against a black person, was so strong, as to raise a high degree of suspicion that the accused would be acquitted, if they were prosecuted for kidnapping."

Probably at this point the committee was feeling somewhat discouraged, but their zeal in tracking down Cryer and Mc-

Clatchy and in having them imprisoned had apparently led the two culprits to suspect that they might be prosecuted for kidnapping and convicted. Probably feeling that the loss of a sum of money was a better alternative than the loss of both ears, both men offered to make a liberal settlement, if civil rather than criminal charges were brought against them. This was done, McClatchy paying one hundred pounds in damages and Cryer settling out of court by offering the committee three hundred dollars, which it accepted. Leah was of course freed, and the committee hoped that "the distress occasioned by the misconduct and the pecuniary suffering of Cryer and McClatchy will deter them from such vices in future and be a warning to others."⁷⁰

Besides cases in which a Negro's freedom was at stake, the acting committee attended to the problem of whites cheating Negroes out of sums of money. In the summer of 1805 the committee was successful in the case of "a black sailor, who had been abused by the Captain, and a part of his wages, about eighteen dollars, detained. In this case, the sailor obtained his full wages, and twenty dollars damages."⁷¹ As can be seen by these examples, the work of the committee was varied and often quite productive.

After 1807 the Abolition Society of Delaware lost much of its former support. Meetings were fewer and farther between, paralleling the experience of the American Convention, which was forced in 1809 to change from annual to triennial meetings, a change which the Delaware society felt obliged to approve.⁷² The Delaware society did not meet from June 8, 1811, until December 24, 1814, and then not again until January 1, 1816, facts which are almost certainly related to the second war with England, and likely related to the rapid commercial and industrial expansion which accompanied it.⁷³

⁷⁰ Acting Committee, Minutes, November 21, 1803.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, August 22, 1805.

⁷² Abolition Society, Minutes, January 21, 1809.

⁷³ Norman B. Wilkinson has suggested that "the decade 1805-1815, when expansion, commerce, embargo, neutral rights and a second war with England engrossed the attention and energies of the American people, witnessed a natural diminution of interest in the slavery problem." "Papers of The Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, LXVIII (July, 1944), 289.

The address which the society made in January to the American Convention is tragic. The writers lament the "bright prospects which attended the origins of the Society," admit that they have met only once in four years, and reflect upon the gloom that surrounds their society in 1816. The address notes that great numbers of "the lukewarm have left our ranks," the result being that the traffic in human beings has increased. Another reason not unplausibly given for waning interest in abolition was the increasing demand for Southern produce, which caused the Southern planters to offer high prices for slaves. The cultivation of green seed cotton, made possible by Whitney's cotton gin, was creating a new industry in the South, one which depended on slave labor, making manumissions less likely and kidnapping of free Negroes very likely. The 1816 report decries the professional men in the State Legislature, who had once been members of the society, who were then accepting fees to advocate the cause of the oppressors.

However, the address goes on, those members who had "seriously contemplated the dissolution of the Society" have taken heart, been joined by younger men, and are resolved to continue.⁷⁴ There was truth in what these men said, for the society did revive and in November of 1816 adopted a new constitution.⁷⁵ Meetings were held with great regularity from that time on, but one event is noticeably absent from their minutes: the reading of the minutes of the acting committee. This could be merely a procedural change, but it could also indicate that the valuable work of this body was circumscribed or abandoned. Even more than before the time of the society was taken up with petitions and essay writing.

Throughout the fall of 1818 dissolution of the society was again seriously discussed, but the controversy was resolved by

⁷⁴ Abolition Society, Minutes, January 4, 1816.

⁷⁵ *The Constitution of the Delaware Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, and for the Relief and Protection of Free Blacks and People of Colour, Unlawfully Held in Bondage or Otherwise Oppressed* (Wilmington: 1816).

This document is nearly identical to the constitution of the Delaware society of 1788, except that the 1816 version specifically states that members may not own slaves. A copy of the constitution under which the Delaware society functioned from 1801 to 1816 could not be located, although it was supposed to have been published in the number of one hundred copies for distribution to members. Dwight L. Dumond notes a copy in his *Anti-Slavery Bibliography* (Ann Arbor: 1961), p. 47.

deciding to continue. There are no extant minutes after July 16, 1819, because the large minute book was filled and if a new book was started it has not survived. Therefore, little is known of the history of the Delaware abolition society after 1819. It continued to send representatives to the American Convention long after other states had fallen away from that organization. The reports which it sent to be read at the convention meetings spoke in the strongest language of the "moral pestilence" and the "highest and most cruel despotism that the world has ever known" that was American slavery as they saw it. The society continued its schools for the manual, intellectual, and religious education of colored children, continued at every favorable opportunity to present petitions to the legislatures asking for a gradual emancipation act, and according to the reports, continued the work of the acting committee in protecting free Negroes and working for the manumission of those held in bondage.⁷⁶

In 1826, the society joined the free produce movement which was an unsuccessful attempt to bring moral and economic pressure on slaveholders by refusing to buy the products of slave labor. Their report to the American Convention in 1827 indicates that they were at that time supporting two schools for Negroes, continuing the work of the acting committee though that was "of late much circumscribed" apparently on account of lack of funds.⁷⁷ In the same year, 1827, Thomas Garrett, Delaware abolitionist and important figure in the underground railroad and a member of the society, was appointed its representative to the American Convention meeting to be held that year. This would seem to indicate a trend away from the very legalistic activities of the earlier society toward the more radical attitude that anything that hastened the decline of slavery was morally obligatory, whether legal or not. The society was one of the three state societies represented at the last meeting of the American Convention in 1838; the other two were New York and Pennsylvania.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Alice Dana Adams, *The Neglected Period of Anti-Slavery in America, 1808-1831* (Boston: 1908), p. 127.

⁷⁷ "To the American Convention, 1827," loose MS file, folder "Slavery and Abolition Society of Delaware," HSD.

⁷⁸ Edward Needles, *An Historical Memoir of the Pennsylvania Society* (Philadel-

The work of the abolition society of Delaware in the early part of the nineteenth century was in many respects admirable. The activities of the whole society and of the acting committee represent the two legal courses which men opposed to slavery could follow at that time. The society meeting tried to get the state legislature to pass more stringent laws, while the acting committee worked diligently to see that the existing laws protecting Negroes were enforced. The whole society meeting distributed literature attacking the institution of slavery, made addresses at the meetings of the American Convention to the same effect, and set up schools for free Negroes, but if there had been no acting committee, the society would have to be judged a failure. It was not a failure because the acting committee did exist and acted positively and quickly to bring to justice men who tried to enslave others illegally.

Edward R. Turner once differentiated between abolitionism and anti-slavery as movements. The first, Turner wrote, originated in Pennsylvania and the Pennsylvania society was a model for all such societies. As a movement abolitionism was earnest, efficient, and conservative, while anti-slavery, a movement which appeared much later in the nineteenth century, was hasty, violent and radical. Rarely did any members of an abolition society break the law—their policy was getting good laws on the books and enforcing them.⁷⁹ The abolition society of Delaware fits its name in this respect, particularly in the years 1801 to 1807, for it seems not in any way related to the later anti-slavery movement. The abolition society of Delaware seems to represent the most rational attempt made in Delaware during the early years of the nineteenth century to ameliorate the institution of slavery.

phia: 1848), pp. 96-97. Dwight L. Dumond disagrees with Needles' dates and reports that the last regular meeting of the American Convention was held in 1832 and that it was formally dissolved in 1837, Dumond, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

In any case, by the mid-thirties the mild abolition movement had been replaced by the more forceful and vituperative anti-slavery movement. By 1846, Delaware, for example, had an anti-slavery society with its headquarters in Wilmington, *ibid.*, p. 47. Though no final date can be set for the Delaware abolition society, it can be assumed that it was defunct or moribund by the early 1840's, or had been absorbed by the Delaware Anti-Slavery Society. See Wilkinson, *loc. cit.*, p. 289.

⁷⁹ Edward Raymond Turner, *The Negro in Pennsylvania* (Washington: 1911), pp. 206-07.